



## **Design Review Working Group**

Date: January 29, 2020

Time: 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Location: First Floor Conference Room, Town Hall Annex, and Field Visit

Attendees: Wynelle Evans, Wendy Richter, Pat Hanlon, Mike Ciampa, Emily Innes, Phillip Hu, Erin Zwirko, Kelly Lynema.

Absent: Andrew Bunnell, Ann Forsyth.

### **Minutes**

Erin introduced the staff from Harriman, Emily Innes and Phillip Hu, and introduced the project to the newly formed Design Review Working Group, which was established to advise the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and Harriman on this project.

Emily reviewed the scope of the project and how it relates to the project schedule, noting that during the meeting the group should identify dates for the two neighborhood workshops. Harriman is currently in the information-gathering phase of the project, which is why the field visit was scheduled as part of the meeting. During the next meeting, Harriman will present a summary of their analysis.

Erin also requested that the group establish a regular monthly meeting time going forward. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 2/27 at 8:30 AM, with regular meetings taking place on the fourth Thursday of the month. Proposed public workshop dates were April 9 and May 21 or May 28.

Emily initiated the discussion by asking the group members to talk about what they feel are the current issues regarding construction in residential neighborhoods, and what is driving the need for design guidelines.

The work of the Residential Study Group, which was formed out of residents concern about tear-downs and change of character in neighborhoods, was discussed. In the report on Demolitions and Replacement Homes, DPCD introduced the idea of residential design guidelines as a way of better managing how new construction could complement existing neighborhood character. Harriman's approach to design guidelines is not to preserve every single characteristic of a neighborhood or require that new construction achieve a pastiche of older surrounding homes, but rather that new

construction acknowledge, or is sympathetic to, the surrounding neighborhood character.

With regard to neighborhood character, the group also discussed concerns around the scale of new development. Wendy said that the Zoning Bylaw currently allows a much larger mass than should be permitted based on lot size, and is interested in identifying ways that the guidelines could permit increased density without increases to apparent density while also preserving neighborhood character. The example of side-by-side townhomes, which are abundant throughout East Arlington, was discussed, with concerns about driveway slope and the way that new development—particularly of this typology but also in single-family new construction—has begun to prioritize the car over the design of the façade and first floor relationship to the street and exterior grade.

The group discussed how builders work with the Zoning Bylaw. Mike stated that Inspectional Services is bound by what the Zoning Bylaw allows. Builders, especially ones who work on multiple projects in town, know the limits and build to them. The guidelines could propose incentives to builders for constructing new homes that complement neighborhood character, but the group was reluctant to offer additional square footage as an incentive.

The group discussed whether the project would result in any amendments to the Zoning Bylaw. Erin explained that one of the outcomes of the project will be the implementation of a design review process and which staff, board, committee, or other entity could add this process to an existing workflow. Any future amendments to the Zoning Bylaw would be related to documenting the process in the Zoning Bylaw and not changes to the density and dimensional requirements. Having a streamlined process could function as an appropriate incentive for builders. Emily described how a compliance alternative process would kick in if a property owner or builder wanted to construct something that did not comply with the guidelines, where in the applicant and a review board would discuss the proposed designs and come to an agreement before construction began. Ultimately, design guidelines help set the expectations for new construction and additions in a community and make the review of proposals less subjective.

Additional discussion around incentives included trying to find other ways to streamline the process, and making it easier to build smaller than larger, and incentivizing energy efficient homes.

Regarding the type of cases reviewed by the Zoning Board of Appeals, Pat said that a lot of applications have to do with large additions and dormers. The ZBA has the most discretion around whether applications fit in with the neighborhood character, issues such as roof lines and dormers often arise. Other constraints in the Zoning Bylaw include the relationship between the structure and the car. Paved front yards are not allowed but do exist in town. In other neighborhoods, there are properties with a smaller house and smaller yard, where the homeowners may wish to finish the garage but cannot due to restrictions in the Zoning Bylaw. The guidelines should not have the

trickle-down effect of punishing homeowners who aren't trying to push the limits of the Zoning Bylaw.

Accessory dwelling units were also discussed, as it is possible that there will be a warrant article regarding ADUs at Town Meeting. One of the community workshops will be after Town Meeting, so depending on the outcome of the warrant article ADUs could be discussed. Wynelle suggested that whether or not ADUs are approved by Town Meeting, the guidelines could address how to more sensitively add a second dwelling unit to a property in an R2 zoning district without negatively impacting neighborhood character.

The group discussed next steps. Erin will send out invitations for the next meeting in February, and will follow up with suggested public workshop dates. She will also set up a shared drive so group members can upload relevant photos and materials.

Wynelle will share the research she has completed around discussions with area planning directors about their design guidelines. She will also share photographs she has taken of good and bad examples of residential construction in Arlington.

Wendy will share the photographs she showed to the group before the field visit.

Before departing on the field visit, Wendy shared a number of photographs of new construction and renovation in Arlington, highlighting good and bad examples. The group then visited three areas of town to see the examples of new construction in context. Sites visited were George Street, Epping Street, and Beacon Street. The group discussed concerns about scale, massing, general proportion, lot coverage, site, and landscaping.